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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a method of language teaching known as counseling-learning, which attends to the psychological and emotional needs of students. The traditional approach to language instruction has generally underestimated this aspect of learning and its importance. The counseling-learning method relies on untapped sources within the student as positive factors, including the innate desire to learn. The psychological blocks inherent in the authoritarian nature of the normal classroom situation are removed. Examples are drawn from an intensive summer German program offered at Miami University's branch campus in Luxembourg. Thirteen students had four contact hours of instruction daily, five days a week. The teaching method centers around the use of a tape recorder. Students begin recording themselves in the target language from the beginning of the course, and the recordings are used as instructional materials and as sources for grammar lessons. The role of the teacher is modified to that of a resource person who functions as a counselor. The student determines his own needs and thereby the pace and presentation of subject matter. Results showed the students' command of German after six weeks to be equal to, if not better than that of students completing a regular first-year university program. (CLK)

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Dieter Stroinigg

Counseling-Learning: A Practical Application in FL Learning

The purpose of this article is to stimulate interest in a relatively new and little known method of language-teaching called Counseling-Learning, a program which promises to do justice to the psychological and emotional needs of students at a time when they no longer can be disregarded. In the past the traditional approach has generally underestimated the importance of this aspect of learning. Various means of dealing with it have included the adjustment of technique in an attempt to entertain or inspire, the introduction of cultural material and the use of visual aids. All too often the goal becomes simply trying to cope. The Counseling-Learning method takes the opposite tack, relying on the untapped resources within the student, including the innate desire of each to learn, as positive factors. This approach frees the desire to learn and vitalizes it by removing the psychological blocks inherent in the authoritarian nature of the normal classroom situation.

For two years the writer has been experimenting with a "Whole-Person Model for Education" developed by Curran, applying it to first and second year German courses at the university level, and in particular to the special requirements of the six-week Intensive Summer Language Program for first and second year offered at Miami University's branch campus in Luxembourg. On the basis of this experience, the writer would like to highlight the general principles, method and success of the Introductory Intensive German Course.

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First a brief description of the course and some data on class size, weekly contact hours, age and motivation of students is in order. The First Year Intensive Course consisted of thirteen students, twelve of whom were undergraduates and ten of whom were twenty-two years of age or younger. Since their main purpose in enrolling was to fulfill part of their FL requirement, the group was to begin with below average in terms of motivation. The initial five weeks of our program were taught in Luxembourg, where we had all the necessary facilities: ample classroom space, library, language laboratory, lounge and offices. The remaining sixth week was a field trip to West Berlin. In Luxembourg the students had four contact hours per day, five days a week, meeting with each of two instructors for two hours daily; they were encouraged to spend their afternoons and evenings studying and speaking the target language. Most of the weekends were free for travel to various sites in Germany and nearby countries. During the week in West Berlin the daily schedule usually included a morning and afternoon lecture on the political situation of the two Germanies, which had been organized in collaboration with the Senate of Berlin. One day was reserved for a visit to East Berlin. The students were encouraged to spend the rest of the time visiting historical sites, museums, theaters, movies in German and above all to meet and become acquainted with native speakers, in order to increase their knowledge about the culture and practice their language skills.

The first class period began with an informal meeting where everyone introduced himself and the instructor stated the general goals and guidelines of the Counseling-Learning approach, after which we casually began a tape-recording session, which the students only later recognized as the basic technique of each class. We formed a circle with a tape recorder in the center and the microphone easily accessible to the participants. Each was encouraged to begin a conversation in German with anyone in the group. He first spoke in English, while the instructor standing behind him as his counselor whispered a close equivalent of the utterance in his ear. The student then repeated the sentences in German into the tape recorder, so that his words would remain for later inspection. The students soon realized they should abbreviate their sentences in order to remember the strange sounds long enough to repeat them into the microphone. After each had the opportunity to record a few of his "German" sentences, the recorder was stopped, rewound and replayed at intervals. Each student was asked to refresh the memory of the others and repeat in English what he heard himself say in German. Some could not remember their words, but there was always someone in the group who did and was able to give the English equivalent, so that no sentence went unremembered and unrepeated. The writer had the opportunity to observe this basic model at a workshop on Community Language Learning at Ann Arbor in May, 1975. Practical experience with it demonstrated how well it lends itself to building confidence rather than inhibition during the first encounters with a new language and, indeed, throughout the program.

In the reflection period immediately following each recording session, the students were asked to express their feelings frankly about their experience. The overwhelming response was surprise, pleasure and a sense of accomplishment for having remembered so much and for actually having spoken German. A grammar lesson of a different breed concluded the period. From the material just recorded, the instructor wrote sentences on the board in order to familiarize the students with the proper spelling and the capitalization peculiarities of German. The students noticed the capitalized nouns and were curious about them without prompting on the instructor's part. If students felt the need to know about these or any other points, they were encouraged to ask. Since the sentences were their own creations, they felt a personal involvement and a closer affinity to them than to something contrived by a teacher or textbook author. It was impossible to cover all of the recorded sentences, thus the instructor naturally chose those sentences containing particular ideas or grammar which demonstrated potential for the students' investigation as well as a gradual progression in basic skills. In effect, the students were often "set up" to ask specific content or grammar questions. If they responded to the stimuli and questioned aspects of the material, their questions were of course answered; if they did not, the instructor assumed that they were not ready to progress to something new. However it cannot be overemphasized that the students were totally unaware that their instructors were subtly maneuvering and continuously taking stock. As far as they were concerned,

they were completely free to address any material within the framework of a first year college German course and in particular to learn what was important to them. The students' contributions were the focal point, not the teacher's.

During the course of the program, the first phase was to teach the students how to learn with this method, and then what to learn, according to their own choice and interests. The results of the program soon became apparent. Some of the students clearly advanced more quickly than others. The group relationship provided that a faster student could advance at his own pace, yet without making the slower students ill-at-ease or resentful of their slower progress. Students helped each other when there was a need for clarification, information or encouragement, leaving the teacher free to observe the learning process without having to direct or seek out reinforcement activities. To a considerable extent, the group provided this by and for itself.

Using this method the writer discovered that the need for a published textbook did not arise, since the group in effect wrote its own. The students were encouraged to copy sentences written on the board into their notebooks, in order to have a record of the material and grammatical points brought out by themselves. Their notes could be used later to refresh their memories and fulfill the need for more information. Each was familiar with what he had written and could refer to it with ease. Most of them carried these "textbooks" wherever they went so that they could reach for them as soon as a question arose. Published material

which proved helpful included a reference grammar and a pocket dictionary containing basic information on the principal parts of strong German verbs, plural forms of nouns, etc. One of the students approached the instructor at the end of the first week to boast that he had already learned 800 words, a feat that even amazed the staff. His experience illustrated how the approach encouraged him to develop his potential as rapidly as he was able.

A primary characteristic of the Counseling-Learning method is the feeling of trust among the members of the group, resulting in a mutual and oper exchange of ideas. Its origin is the self-identification and self-realization which the student develops when he is in a stable and productive relationship with others. He no longer needs to learn on a competitive basis, but wants to satisfy his curiosity by exploring the language and culture .

Clearly the role of the teacher is modified. He is no longer the prescription giver who proclaims, "You should study chapters 1 and 2. This sound is pronounced differently in German, John; why don't you repeat it for Mary. This is a good review, and remember, you will have a quiz on these chapters at the end of the week." Instead, the instructor is a resource person who provides necessary information--he functions as a counselor. In practical terms, it is the student who, in his desire to learn what is meaningful for him, determines his own needs and thereby the pace and presentation of subject matter. For instance, it would not be unusual for questions about German tenses to arise even in the first class session. But such questions might also not occur until the end of

the first, second, or even third week. The subjunctive mood, traditionally taught at the end of the first year, was discussed in this group at the end of the first week, because the students felt they should know it. When some of the students would not accept "Was möchten Sie zum Frühstück?" as a mere idiom, it was time to discuss the use of the subjunctive. The teacher did not try to console the students, as one traditionally does, with the statement: "That is a very interesting question. 'Möchten' is a subjunctive form; however, that is too advanced for you at this point. Would you please hold off with this until we reach it in our book?"

Student-directed learning implies that the teacher must be prepared at any moment to explain any given point. A well-organized planning book or the practice of keeping one lesson ahead of the students are neither desirable nor possible with this method. In the learning process, the student holds most of the initiative in his hands. A reversal of the conventional teacher-student role has taken place. The students actually prescribe the lesson plan and raise questions for which they seek answers; the teacher is obligated to fulfill the students' needs. As to the question of whether this method invokes the danger of anarchy or chaos, the answer is an unequivocal "no." The students' desire to learn becomes primary, and thus precludes immature acts of disruption. Learning becomes a group effort with a minimum of competition, allowing "each student to grow in self-worth and self-understanding and in appreciation of himself and others as he increases in knowledge." (Curran , p.2)

The writer's experience in Luxembourg as well as in regular campus courses has convinced him that the method displays great flexibility and effectiveness in language classes of widely differing size. If the class contains twenty students or more it is best to divide it into smaller groups of five or six, the optimum group size. The counselor's function is then filled by more advanced students, one in each group. The instructor becomes the resource person, who responds directly to the counselors' questions. A very effective application of the Counseling-Learning method, this distribution of responsibility is a further means of diminishing inhibitions. Its success and rewards for the teacher are apparent in the students' active participation and enthusiasm.

Instead of testing with weekly or biweekly quizzes, our approach prescribes brief daily talks with each student individually, when the instructor "counsels" him, encouraging him to assess his own accomplishments and deficiencies. In the Luxembourg program no letter grades were given until the end in order to discourage competition, unless a student requested it. At the end of five weeks the students took the departmental final, a two-hour written exam, given each semester on campus. It tested basic German grammar through multiple choice questions, fill-ins, translation from German to English and vice versa, and reading passages with related questions and answers. Due to the need for articulation with advanced courses, a traditional final was given at this point; an oral proficiency exam was administered at the end of the sixth week in West Berlin, determining comprehension of

the lectures attended during the week and the ability to converse about their experiences. In the departmental final the students of the Intensive Program averaged in the upper 20% range in comparison with the on-campus students, who had completed the regular introductory course that year. The oral examination left no doubt that the students of the Luxembourg program were far more proficient in speaking and writing. However after returning to classes in the fall it became apparent that they were somewhat deficient in reading skills due to the smaller vocabulary that could be mastered in the span of six weeks. Nevertheless, they were proud to have achieved the equivalent of first year college German in that period of time.

Although our program is still in its beginning stages, we already have considerable evidence that the Counseling-Learning approach applied as a track in the regular campus program would lead to higher motivation, and higher motivation implies better results. At present two of nine instructors at Miami University's main campus are committed to using the method full-time, resulting in classes with students of differing backgrounds. Until we are able to establish a track for the initial two years of the language, the long-range effect of the approach will be difficult for the writer to assess firsthand. Meanwhile its short-range success was clearly demonstrated both on a technical and psychological plane. The written and oral exams showed the students' command of German after six weeks to be on a par with, if not better than, that of students completing a regular first year university program.

In addition, their evaluations written at the end of the course testify to their having developed a feeling of satisfaction and self-reliance upon discovering their own capacity to relate their thoughts and emotions to the German language. It is the psychological factor of this decidedly humanistic approach to learning that holds great promise.

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